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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: implementation of Strategic Objectives and Action in the Critical Areas of Concern

Statement submitted by Rotary International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

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For many women around the world, each day is a struggle simply to survive. They endure physically taxing jobs to feed their families, because basic education is a luxury they cannot afford. They are the victims of violence, frequently at the hands of someone they love. Many die or suffer from preventable diseases because they lack adequate health care.

In June 1998, Rotary International will present its highest honour, the Rotary Award for World Understanding, to Dr. Catherine Hamlin for her ground-breaking work in the treatment of vaginal fistula (abnormal openings between the bladder and/or the vagina and rectum). Hamlin, along with her late husband Dr. Reginald Hamlin, refined surgical procedures to relieve incontinence and pain caused by severe trauma during childbirth.

Initially the success rate for surgical treatment of vaginal fistula was low, but it has improved with Hamlin's continuing research to exceed 90 per cent. As a result, more than 15,000 women in developing countries have resumed active lives rather than become social outcasts as their condition deteriorates.

At the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia, co-founded in 1975 by Hamlin, patients receive educational and vocational training in addition to post-operative physical

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therapy. They are given new clothing, food and money before returning to their villages. Many women choose to stay on at the hospital to help treat others suffering from the devastating condition.

The Rotary Award for World Understanding, established in 1980, is bestowed annually on a non-Rotarian who exemplifies the Rotary ideal of "service above self", especially in the promotion of international understanding, good will and peace through humanitarian service. During the Rotary International Convention in Indiana, United States, from 14 to 17 June, Hamlin will receive the crystal flame award and a US$ 100,000 Rotary Foundation check to benefit the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital. Past recipients of the Award include Nelson Mandela, former United States President Jimmy Carter, Pope John Paul II, and the Salvation Army.

Rotary's service to women

Rotary encourages Rotarians to develop projects that address the needs of women in their communities and provide women with access to education, economic and social development, and health care.

Rotary clubs and districts provide vocational training, prenatal care, revolving loan funds, basic health services, and aid for battered women, among other types of assistance. Most projects can be adapted to benefit women around the world.

Sustainable economic development

Uganda – A Rotary Village Corps, developed by two Rotary clubs, secured a US$ 300,000 Rotary Foundation grant to develop and launch the Sustainable Economic Empowerment and Development (SEED) Project in 1997. Seeking to improve health and community life in Rakai, the Corps created trust banks (of which most of the trustees are women) which operate an incremental microcredit loan programme. The SEED project will enable the women of Rakai to become increasingly self-sufficient and capable of solving community problems through business, water, sanitation, agricultural and environmental means.

Guatemala – In July 1997, Rotary clubs in Virginia (United States) and Guatemala teamed up with the Rotary Foundation to establish two village banks to lend money to women in the community of Chimaltenango starting small businesses.

Education and vocational training

England – Under an adult literacy programme, tutors for Rotary's Choppington Project help prepare housewives to enter the job market or return to work. Women receive valuable advice on all aspects of a job search, from filling out applications to learning how to navigate the interview process.

Pakistan – The Rotary Club of Lahore Central sponsors vocational training for young girls in their community. The Club secures employment and provides transportation and follow-up mentoring.

Philippines – The Intramuros Rotary Club sponsors a Rotary Village Corps project which provides training in sewing skills to housewives entering the workforce, to people who are unable to afford higher education, and to disabled people. With the assistance of the Technology and Livelihood Resource Center, the project now has 200 sewing machines and is continuously training both men and women.

Domestic issues

United States – The Rotary Club of Wicomico County, Maryland, developed and raised funds for a project to build a community "safe house" for women and children who are victims of domestic abuse.

The Bardstown Rotary Club in Kentucky, provided funding to the Spouse Abuse Center and established an awareness programme to raise community consciousness about the issue of domestic abuse.

Ireland – Rotary clubs in Cork provide an organized day-long excursion in the country as a regular respite for women and children who are victims of domestic abuse.

Health issues

India – Rotary districts from Germany and Nigeria collaborated to develop a family health and planning project which benefited more than 500,000 women and their families. With the assistance of a matching grant from the Rotary Foundation, modern medical equipment was installed in three area hospitals.

Brazil – Doctors involved in the Mamma Project in Rio Claro and throughout the outskirts of the city traveled by ambulance to raise awareness among women of breast cancer and breast cancer prevention. Women learned about medical exams and breast exams and received a reference card with diagrams and instructions on how to examine their own breasts at home. In addition, several public-service announcements were aired on radio and television to raise awareness of the importance of self-examinations. Over 30,300 women have benefited directly or indirectly from the project.

The Rotary Award for the Advancement of Women

To encourage clubs to focus on women's issues, the Rotary International Board established the Rotary Award for the Advancement of Women, an international recognition accompanied by a US$ 50,000 Rotary grant. The award is given to the Rotary club that creates the most outstanding long-term, sustainable project which advances the development and progress of women.

The 1996-1997 award was presented to the Brasilia-Oeste (Brazil) Rotary Club for its work in developing a programme providing economic, vocational and social support to needy mothers in the community of Santa Maria. The ongoing programme offers single and disabled mothers basic child-care classes, seminars and instructional videos on health-care issues and family planning, safe drinking water and basic sanitation. The project also helps the women become economically independent by providing computer and vocational training.

Nominees for the 1997-1998 award included a vocational fish preservation training programme for women of fishermen's families at Bikeli Village, Atauro Island, in East Timor; a health information campaign for women in Mexico; a family life resource centre in the Philippines; and a menopause clinic in Turkey.